



Illuminated Frontpiece from the *Tamhīdāt* of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī. MS. Ethé 1793, f. 1v.; n.d. (Courtesy of the India Office Library).

In Quest of Annihilation: Imaginalization and Mystical Death in the *Tamhīdāt* of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī

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PROLOGUE

In the annals of twelfth-century Persian Sufism 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī is renowned for his daring and eloquent expression of the most esoteric elements of Sufi doctrine. A paragon of the paradoxical position, he was at once an authority in the sphere of the religious law (*sharī'a*) and one of the most famous of the apparent antinomians, or 'shatterers' of the mould of that law. His name also calls to mind Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj (martyred 922), whose tradition he followed and whose passion-to-the-death became to him a constant preaching and living practice. Indeed, it was that very fire of Ḥallājīan love that drove 'Ayn al-Qudāt inward from the shell of legal convention to penetrate the kernel of the Truth embodied therein, inspired by his master Aḥmad Ghazālī (brother of the illustrious theologian, Muḥammad Ghazālī), famed as the 'Sultan of the Sufi Path' among other towering spiritual figures of this period.

'Ayn al-Qudāt flourished in the age of the great founding fathers of Sufism; he was a contemporary of the founder of the Qādirī Order, 'Abd al-Qādir Jilānī (d. 561/1166), as well as the founder of the Suhrawardī *silsila* (known as the 'Mother of the Orders', *umm al-salāsīl*), Abū'l-Najīb al-Suhrawardī (d. 563/1168, who was also 'Ayn al-Qudāt's fellow disciple under Aḥmad Ghazālī) and of Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf Hamadānī (d. 535/1140), his fellow townsman and founder of the chain which was to lead to the establishment of the Naqshbandī Order. He breathed in the same heady fragrance of poetic mysticism which his contemporary giants in Persian mystical poetry, Sanā'ī (d. between 525/1131 and 545/1150) and Nizāmī (d.

598/1202) had absorbed, and was swept up in the same wave of ecstatic spirituality whose *élan* intoxicated and then dashed down to early martyrdom the brilliant 'Master of the Philosophy of Oriental Illumination' (Shaykh al-Ishrāq) Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191).

Insofar as the key to the spiritual attainments of 'Ayn al-Qudāt lay in his exceptional attitude to death, that is to say, his conscious 'pursuit of annihilation', the present study¹ focuses on the concept of *fanā* in his Persian writings. Since no philosophical doctrine may be properly analyzed in isolation from other ideas which infiltrate its inspiration, five or six other—outwardly extraneous but inwardly intimately related—themes will also hold our attention.

In the first part of the essay, 'Ayn al-Qudāt's youth, spiritual affiliations and early intellectual development are discussed, followed by a brief look at the inspiration of his longest Persian book, the *Tamhīdāt*, in the second part. Part three analyses the nature of 'annihilation' in 'Ayn al-Qudāt's thought. Annihilation of the self is the basis of the Sufi *via purgativa*, so extensive treatment of the various forms in which this doctrine appears in his writings is given. Part four discusses the type of consciousness which the adept realizes in the realm of annihilation, presenting 'Ayn al-Qudāt's views on mystical anthropology, the reality of death and the science of 'imaginalization' which enables the aspirant to attain mystical death. Lastly some conclusions are presented on 'Ayn al-Qudāt's views of the relationship between physical and mystical death, between the orthodox and the mystical view of the hereafter, and why one must transcend formal Islam to understand any of these matters.

I. FROM MULLA TO SUFI: THE DISCIPLESHIP OF 'AYN AL-QUḌĀT

Abū al-Ma'ālī 'Abdullāh ibn Abī Bakr Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Miyānjī, better known as 'Ayn al-Qudāt

Hamadhānī, was born in Hamadān, Iran in 492/1098.² Miyānjī, the city of his family's origins, is located between Tabriz and Maragheh in the province of Azerbaijan in northwestern Iran. 'Ayn al-Qudāt's grandfather Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan migrated with his family from Miyānjī to Hamadān where he settled, gaining an established reputation as a Judge (*Qāḍī*), as well as some renown as a poet in the Arabic language. He died a martyr. His son, the father of 'Ayn al-Qudāt, also became a judge, passing on the family profession to his son, 'Ayn al-Qudāt.

'Ayn al-Qudāt received the normal education in the traditional sciences of his day: Mathematics, Logic, Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Tradition (*Ḥadīth*), prosody and the *belles-lettres* (both Arabic and Persian). He particularly excelled in scholastic theology (*Kalām*), and in his Arabic-language *Apologia*, the only work of his translated today into English,³ he demonstrates a formidable mastery of grammar, linguistics, mathematics, logic, and prosody.

'Ayn al-Qudāt's childhood and early years were pervaded by the mystical milieu and spiritual ideals of Sufism. His father habitually brought him to attend local Sufi seances⁴ and at age sixteen or seventeen he became a disciple of a certain Baraka, a Sufi Shaykh whose lack of exoteric learning did nothing to impede the youth's devotion to his gnostic 'wisdom of the heart'. Concerning him 'Ayn al-Qudāt recalled that

He had memorized no more than the Surah *al-Ḥamd*, that is, the Opening Surah of the Koran (*Fāṭiḥa*), and a few other short Surahs. He could only recite these in special circumstances, himself unaware of any of the learned discussions and debates surrounding these texts. Actually, if one were to probe deeply into his learning, he could not even recite any of the *Ḥadīths* in our local Hamadhānī dialect. Despite this, I know that it is he who understands the Koran correctly and not me — except for some of it — and even that I do not know through the science of hermeneutical exegesis (*tafsīr*). Aside from this, and that which

2. See 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī, *Tamhīdāt*, edited with an introduction by Afif Osseiran (Tehran 1962), introduction, p. 45. [Abbreviated hereafter as "T"]

3. A.J. Arberry, trans., *A Sufi Martyr: The Apologia of 'Ain al-Qudāt al-Hamadhānī* (London: Allen & Unwin 1969).

4. T 250-52.

1. The author would like to acknowledge his gratitude to Dr. Jeffrey Rothschild, Dr. Muhammad Isa Waley, Dr. Merida Blanco, Phillip Edmundson and Paul Weber for providing invaluable comments on initial drafts of this article.

I realized through service to him, I understood nothing of the Koran.⁵

In a letter to one of his disciples written a decade later, 'Ayn al-Qudāt also recalled his profound attraction to this saint and the agonizing efforts he underwent during his period of discipleship under him:

I spent seven years visiting Baraka, but never once did I dare to touch the thongs of his sandals.⁶ Do you think that the Men do not realize what the sign of a Man is? If one of the heart's sovereigns (*ṣāhib dil*) were to take you into his heart, and you were to lay a finger on one of the Men's sandals, Satanic arrogance would have prompted you to this. In order that one of the heart's sovereigns may accept you into his heart the first stage and requirement is that your heart remain on fire in his love for several years. If you remain constant in this devotion, he will then seize the 'you' from 'yourself'.⁷

'Ayn al-Qudāt's attitude here reflects the overwhelming influence of the Khurāsānī tradition of Persian Sufism during the early twelfth century in which it was customary for the disciple to treat his master with the same awe and veneration exacted by absolute temporal sovereigns from their subjects. The truth of Hermann Landolt's observation that "the presence of a living master and not the study of books was the First condition of the mystic life of Hamadānī"⁸ is borne out in all of his later writings.

The agony of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's novitiate is also painfully expressed in another letter addressed to a notable disciple, employed

5. From one of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's Epistles, cited by Afif Osseiran, T 63, introduction.

6. The author refers to the custom of removing one's shoes on entering the Sufi *khānaqāh*, where, as a form of service, novice dervishes were often employed as doorkeepers responsible for organizing and setting in orderly pairs the sandals and shoes of the dervishes. The 'doorkeeper' is considered to be very high position in many of the Iranian *ṭarīqas*. For instance, it is not uncommon today for novices of the Qādiriyya Order in Iran to wait many years before being granted permission by their Shaykh to arrange the dervishes' shoe rack. (Hence, Sa'di's dictum: "Service to people is the whole of worship," cited above, p. xxvi).

7. T, introduction, pp. 61-62.

8. 'Two Types of Mystical Thought in Muslim Iran: An Essay on Suhrawardi Shaykh al-Ishrāq and 'Aynulquzāt-i Hamadānī' in *The Muslim World*, vol. 68 (1978), p. 194.

at the royal court, who questioned him about pursuit of the Spiritual Path:

You still have no awareness. Even after you free yourself from being a servant of Sultan Maḥmūd, you must spend many years serving the Men of the Way, until they either wrest 'you' from yourself or abandon you. Then you will fathom the agony and ecstasy of the disciple.

What have you to do with tales of devotion (*irādāt*) to a master? You have not tasted yet of the joy of union nor suffered the pain of separation from him; neither have you experienced the awesome majesty and grandeur of his presence. You have not wished to die every day, a thousand times.... You have not yet experienced infinite remorse, have not been swept under the sea and drowned in its depths, losing yourself in the tributaries and vales flushed with the blood and the grief of your love. You have not piled dust and ashes on your own head a thousand times over, letting that cruel hand leave unwashed your ashen brow, wailing with none to watch.

Nor have you bound a cincture about yourself a million times – sometimes with your own hand and sometimes by the hand of the master, being cast headlong into a pool of blood and dust. You have not sunk the razor-sharp tooth of the shark of voluntary failure into your heart! You have not dug up an entire mountain with your fingernails! Why concern yourself with these tales? How should they mean anything to you?⁹

Stressing the indispensability of a living spiritual master in the training both of the Sufi disciple and the religious scholar, 'Ayn al-Qudāt told another disciple:

What do you know and what does most of the world know what the Koran is? Your Koranic recitation, your prayers, your fasting, your almsgiving, your *Hajj* and *jihād* is that you seek to attain closeness to the sandals of a Man, so that you may make the earth on which he walks day and night your eye's collyrium, so that perhaps – after you have spent fifty years of your life in his service – one day he may cast his glance upon you and you will be blessed by fortune.

But what can you understand of this which you hear – that

9. T, introduction, pp. 87-88.

by one glance the beloved bestows myriad favors? No. "One who has not tasted it does not know its flavor." I wait for the time when I may be favored by this glance.¹⁰

Despite Baraka's lack of formal education, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-ways was in awe of his high spiritual stature:

When I sat in Baraka's company I always felt myself to be little more, in fact much less, than a fresh convert to Islam who knows nothing of its religious or intellectual history. *Vis-à-vis* Baraka this was actually my condition, but still I had the power within me to compose the *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq* in two or three days.¹¹

The book referred to in this passage was 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's first philosophical composition¹² written in 516/1122 at age twenty-four—apparently in order to resolve, through visionary insight, (*kashf*) both his own spiritual crisis and certain intellectual enigmas confounding him in scholastic theology. When he was twenty years old (in 512/1118), he had begun to study the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, the monumental encyclopedia of Islamic piety by Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), which he continued to read with intense interest, for four years, until 516/1122. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt describes himself as having been led to study the science of *Kalām* "like a drowning man trying to save himself,"¹³ and the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, with its elaborate defence and advocacy of the truths of Sufism and reconciliation of the Sufis' views with those of nomocentric theologians,¹⁴ proved the proper palliative for the scholar's pain, as he wrote:

Whilst afflicted by this crisis, confused and perplexed, my life was in tatters, until the Guide of those bewildered in the Vale of Confusion set me on the right path and graciously assisted me. Thus, by God's grace, through study of the books of *Shaykh al-Islām* Muḥammad Ghazālī, I was delivered from falling headlong from this horrifying precipice. I spent nearly four years

studying his works, during which time my complete preoccupation with [religious] learning ('*ulūm*') caused me to behold many marvels which delivered me from heresy, error, blindness and perplexity.¹⁵

Another significant factor in 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's early spiritual development was his encounter, in 512/1118 at age 21, with Abū Ḥamid's less famous but equally celebrated brother, Aḥmad Ghazālī. Although intellectually already a follower of Abū Ḥamid Ghazālī, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's emotional temperament was deeply affected by the 'school of love'¹⁶ advocated by Aḥmad. And as he confesses in the *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq*, his encounter, in the flesh, with this spiritual teacher rivalled in importance the study of all the religious textbooks of the other Ghazālī:

Little by little, the eye of inner vision (*chashm-i baṣīrat*) opened. While this process was going on, I began to look for a way which would bring me to that which transcends science. I spent nearly one year in this condition, without being able to realize inwardly the actual reality which I had discovered. Then I encountered my spiritual guide and master (*pīr*) and venerable guide to the divine Reality (*ḥaqīqat*), Abū'l-Faṭḥ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ghazālī (may God preserve the Islamic community through his life and reward him for his goodness to me!) whom destiny had brought to Hamadhān, my hometown and birthplace.

I had spent no more than twenty days in his company when all the veils of perplexity mentioned above were lifted and an experience was vouchsafed me during which the actuality of things became apparent to me and a Reality revealed to me so that nothing remained of 'me' or 'my desires', except what God had willed. For many years now I have had no other occupation but the quest for annihilation and absorption in this Reality¹⁷—may God assist me in accomplishing this aim... Were I to be granted the lifespan of Noah and to pass it entirely in this quest

10. *Ibid.*

11. T, introduction, p. 61.

12. According to Prof. Landolt, an unpublished English translation and analytical study of the *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq* by Dr. 'Umar Jah exist in the library of the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal.

13. T, introduction, p. 48.

14. A.J. Arberry, *A Sufi Martyr*, p. 14.

15. Cited in T, introduction, p. 48.

16. See N. Pourjavady's translation of Aḥmad Ghazālī's *Sawānīh*, under the title of *Inspirations from the World of Pure Spirits* (London: KPI 1986), introduction, p. 15.

17. Hence, our title; the original Arabic of this phrase in the *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq* (ed. Afif Osseiran [Tehran 1341 A.Hsh./1962], p. 7) reads: *Laysa lī shughlun illā ṭalab al-fanā' fi dhālīka'l-shay'.*

it would be of no significance, for, in relation to this Reality, all life is worthless. It is a Reality which encompasses the whole world. My eye has never beheld anything without first seeing that Reality manifested therein. May Fortune frown upon every moment of my life which does not cause my absorption in this reality to increase!¹⁸

The above passage, penned in the light of his overwhelming vision of the 'beauty of the spiritual guide' which appeared to 'Ayn al-Qudāt in the form of Aḥmad Ghazālī, was to make an even more illustrious entrance into the annals of Persian Sufi poetry when Jāmī (d. 898/1492) later versified the original Arabic prose in his *Subḥat al-abrār* (under the rubric, "The Tale of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī, who could split many a hair of knowledge, yet was still was no more than a hair wrapped around himself, for until he sought out the society of Aḥmad Ghazālī, he was unable to thread the needle of this Work") in eloquent Persian *mathnawī* verse.¹⁹

Probably from the earliest days of his association with Baraka, it had become clear to his contemporaries that 'Ayn al-Qudāt's dry juridical gown and turban harbored a fiery prodigy of the spirit. Even before his composition of the *Zubdat* he had recounted his "abhorrence for the pursuit of knowledge" which he felt to be due to his preoccupation with the 'affairs of the heart'—meaning the pursuit of the spiritual discipline and Path of Sufism. "I even wondered how I could ever find leisure to write anything again," he noted,²⁰ admitting that if his friends, who hung on his words, had not prevailed upon him he would never have put pen to paper.²¹

The depth and extent of his absorption in God were also revealed

18. T, introduction, pp. 51-52.

19. Jāmī, *Mathnawī-yi Haft awrang*, ed. Murtaḍā Mudarris-Gilānī, 2nd edit. (Tehran: Sa'di 1366 A.Hsh./1987), p. 461. As Aḥmad Mujāhid points out (*Majmū'a-yi āthār-i fārsi-yi Aḥmad Ghazālī*, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihārān 1370 A.Hsh./1991, 2nd edit., p. 116), Jāmī's poetic gloss on 'Ayn al-Qudāt's encounter with the '*Sulṭān-i ṭarīqat*' Aḥmad Ghazālī exemplifies the truth that intellectual knowledge and scholarly investigation alone—however profound, sincere or dedicated—are ultimately doomed to spiritual failure without the intercessionary 'company' (*ṣuḥbat*) with and 'service' (*khidmat*) to the spiritual guide. And here Jāmī reaffirms the totally 'Sufi' context of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's thought.

20. *Zubdat*, p. 2; cited in T, introduction, p. 66.

21. *Ibid.*

through certain remarkable charismatic powers (*karāmāt*), such as one ability, through mastery of the powers of certain divine Names and supplications, to slay and revive a man (the circumstances of which are recounted in great detail in the *Tamhīdāt*).²² Reflecting back, a decade later, on this incident—which had, of course, aroused the jealousy of the weak-spirited, ignorant common people and evoked the wrath of the theocrats of Hamadhān—'Ayn al-Qudāt was very emphatic that wisdom is self-known, openly admitting his conscious awareness and acceptance of the existence of such 'miracles' worked through (rather than *by*) him:

But people just do not listen to me. They think I am a magician. However, just as Jesus worked miracles and with his breath made birds come to life, made the blind into seers and the dead to rise²³...so the Friend of God (*walī-yi khudā*) has [similar] charismatic powers, and this destitute wretch [i.e. 'Ayn al-Qudāt] also possesses these powers.²⁴

Placing himself under the tutelage of Aḥmad Ghazālī, 'Ayn al-Qudāt progressed more rapidly than ever in his spiritual quest. Re-counting his encounter with Aḥmad Ghazālī, he wrote:

The majesty of the pre-eternal dominion became radiantly clear to me and my own reason and knowledge were shattered and dissolved in its glory. I was left as an author incognizant of himself. His Real Existence supplanted and embraced my being and garbed my illusory being in Himself.²⁵

With such charismatic gifts and mystical visions, 'Ayn al-Qudāt soon became known as a sage in his own right, and gained considerable popularity as a lecturer.²⁶ In 517/1123, at age 25, he began to write a series of epistles, actually letters of spiritual counsel, to

22. T 250-52.

23. The author refers to part of the Koranic account of the miracles of Jesus, found in Surah V: 110.

24. T 250, no. 327.

25. T introduction, p. 55.

26. In one of his epistles he states: "Every day I teach seven or eight classes in different fields of knowledge to diverse types of people. In each class—God knows best—I do not ever discourse in less than a thousand words. I do not know whether I will lose my life because of my tongue or my pen!" Cited in T, introduction, p. 77.

disciples and close friends. Two bulky volumes of these letters have been published by 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's indefatigable Persian editor, Afif Osseiran.²⁷ These volumes, however, represent only a third of the entire correspondence of the young visionary!²⁸ As 'Ayn al-Quḍāt wrote at the time: "For some time now I have been so wrapped up in this passion that I compose four or five different letters every day and night. Each letter contains some eighty lines and every word therein is a priceless gem." It would seem that by the time he was twenty-eight years old, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt had reached full intellectual maturity, and from then on the epithet 'Ayn al-Quḍāt (Cynosure of Judges) appears in the letters addressed to him by Aḥmad Ghazālī,²⁹ who also habitually addressed this brilliant disciple as his own "son" and the "light of my eyes."³⁰

Although 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's writing is intimately bound up with his life as a practising *Qāḍī* and public lecturer in Hamadān, there are several passages in his epistles where he describes his daily life in the Sufi cloister (*Khānaqāh*). The main emphasis of his literary efforts was to advance the course of his many Sufi disciples on the mystical path. His writings may be seen as a pedagogical device for those same disciples, the study of the *Tamhīdāt* revealing how inseparable the spiritual experiences and the Path (*ṭarīqat*) of Sufism were from the philosophical thought of the sage.³¹

The following section is devoted to examining the literary style and inspiration of the *Tamhīdāt*, the longest Persian prose work and most mature composition of 'Ayn al-Quḍāt on mystical theology, followed by three other sections which discuss the leitmotifs of mystical death, imaginalization (*tamaththul*), annihilation (*fanā*), selflessness and obliteration (*maḥw*), which appear in the *Tamhīdāt*.

27. *Nāmāh-yi 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī*, vol. 1, edited by 'Alinaqi Munzawī and Afif Osseiran (Tehran: Intishārāt-i bunyād-i farhang-i Irān # 73, 1969); vol. 2, edited by 'Alinaqi Munzawī and Afif Osseiran (Tehran: Intishārāt-i bunyād-i farhang-i Irān # 138, 1971).

28. See T, introduction, p. 80.

29. T, introduction, p. 46.

30. These letters have been published by N. Pourjavady: *Mukātabāt-i Khwāja Aḥmad Ghazālī bā 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Khānaqāh-i Ni'matullāhī 1356 A.Hsh./1977), introduction, p. 9.

31. T, introduction, pp. 79-80.

II. ECSTASY IN A SEA OF MEANING: THE INSPIRATION OF THE *TAMHĪDĀT*

Four years before his execution, at age thirty-three in 525/1131, at the hands of the powerful Seljuk vizier Abu'l-Qāsim al-Darguzīnī, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt composed his longest work: *Tamhīdāt*. The prose style of this work, written nearly nine hundred years ago, is very straightforward—one might even say 'modern in form'³²—and devoid of conscious ornament. Nevertheless, owing to the great number of outwardly unrelated allusions to the Koran and *Hadīth* and the generally ecstatic disposition of the author, the language is often dense and difficult to follow. His literary style, aside from his original analytical approach to theology, most resembles that of his master, Aḥmad Ghazālī, concerning whose difficult writings Nasrollah Pourjavady has observed that "the literal meanings of his words acted as mere husks for the symbolic allusions contained within them; such expressions were intended to be understood only by mystics endowed with intuitive 'taste', 'heart-savour' (*ahl-i dhawq*)."³³ "L'esthétique soufie, chez 'Ayn al-Quḍāt," observes Christiane Tortel, commenting upon the *Tamhīdāt*'s original literary style, "est construite sur une vision sans stéréotype, totalement subjective. C'est une esthétique non normative."³⁴

In the *Tamhīdāt* 'Ayn al-Quḍāt basically confines himself to a discussion of the essential principles of Sufism rather than incidental corollaries. So esoteric and startling were its contents, however, that the author, when arrested, deliberately attempted to hide the fact that he had composed it, not even giving it a final title.³⁵ Nonetheless, he clearly intended the work to serve as a lasting monument to

32. As Majd al-'Alā Khurāsānī pointed out, "'Ayn al-Quḍāt," in *Armagan* (1306/1926), pp. 31-41.

33. N. Pourjavady, *Mukātabāt-i Aḥmad Ghazālī*, introduction, p. 9. The notion of 'taste' is also fundamental to Abū Ḥāmid's epistemology; see E.L. Ormsby, "The Taste of Truth: the Structure of Experience in al-Ghazālī's *Al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*" in W.B. Hallaq & D. Little, *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: Brill 1991), pp. 133-52.

34. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī: *Les Tentations Métaphysiques (Tamhīdāt)*, Présentation, traduction du persan et de l'arabe, et notes par Christiane Tortel (Paris: Les Deux Océans 1992), introduction, p. 25.

35. T, introduction, p. 15.

his mature theosophical speculation rather than as a treatise merely composed for his own generation, as he explicitly stated at the end of the book.³⁶

As shown above (pp. 287ff.), the writings of 'Ayn al-Qudāt cannot be understood without recourse to the mystical terminology and spiritual disciplines of Sufism. In his Arabic language treatise *Shakwā'l-gharīb*, 'Complaint of a Stranger in Exile', after providing an extensive discussion of the history of Sufism,³⁷ 'Ayn al-Qudāt notes that just as each field of academic study has its own technical language, the words of the Muslim mystics likewise cannot be understood without recourse to the terminology (*iṣṭilāḥāt*) of the Sufis. And after defending his thought as directly belonging to the classical Sufi tradition—he even indexes his own utterances by reference to the pre-eminent Islamic mystics³⁸—and giving his unqualified support to the 'science of Sufism' (*'ilm-i taṣawwuf*), he states unequivocally: "Every expression of mine occurring in these anecdotes requires the preparation of rules and the laying down of fundamentals of the science of Sufism, so that its meaning may be fully realized."³⁹ The *Tamhīdāt*, likewise, which was written shortly before the *Shakwā'l-gharīb*, and many passages of which are meditations upon the dicta of the Sufis, also ardently pleads the cause of the Sufi tradition.⁴⁰

In the first few pages of the book, interpreting the famous *ḥadīth* used by many Islamic esotericists to defend their right to freedom of

36. "Come forth from selfhood if you can, that you may hear this mystery and be worthy of these words. I know that you will say, 'Yes,' and although I have said that the person being addressed [in this book] is you, my intent was to address not those present today, but those who are to come after me and who will gain extraordinary profit from the study of this book."—T 327.

37. For the Arabic text, see Afif Osseiran, *Muṣannafat-i 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī* (Tehran: Dānīshgāh 1341 A.Hsh./1962). For an English translation, see A.J. Arberry, *Apologia*. For an extensive discussion of the ideas in this treatise, see Hamid Dabashi's article "'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī wa Risāla-i Shakwā'l-gharīb-i ū," *Iran Nameh*, 11/1 (1993), pp. 57-74. My analysis here draws on some of the conclusions of Dr. Dabashi's study.

38. Even adducing 13 pages of definitions of Sufism to support his arguments, on which, see Arberry, *Apologia*, pp. 43-56.

39. Arberry, *Apologia*, pp. 57-8.

40. Cf. T, p. 300, for instance, where the highest mystical adept is defined as "a *hulūlī* who is a Sufi."

expression: "Speak to people according to their intellectual capacities," 'Ayn al-Qudāt observes that the bewilderment and incomprehension of some non-mystics in the face of his exposition betray their own intellectual limitations, rather than any deficiency in his own powers of expression:

In these pages certain sayings will be related which are not meant for that dear friend,⁴¹ but rather for others among the lovers who were absent during its composition. The latter should also receive some benefit—so do not imagine that you were my sole object in its composition. All that one hears which does not correspond to one's spiritual station or is beyond one's intellectual capacity will always be misunderstood and rejected anyway. My friend, do you imagine that the Koran was addressed to just one group of people, or to one hundred tribes, or to one hundred thousand tribes? No, each verse, each word, is addressed to a different person, intended for another individual—or rather, for another universe. In the same way, each sentence written in these pages possesses its own particular spiritual station and state; each word has its own peculiar purpose and unto each aspirant a different discourse will be directed.⁴²

He also clearly felt, prophetically, the immense importance of his opus in the history of Sufism, boasting:

To extol these words it befits you to surrender yourself utterly to them. After all, do you not realize that among all the possible styles of literary expression, nothing can be uttered with greater precision and clarity than this? You must transcend both worlds⁴³—then you will be able to give a proper reckoning of these words and commune with them. From the two worlds, the world of the soul (*malakūt*) and the world of divine Sovereignty (*jabarūt*), no more than this can ever be brought into this world. Alas! How can you understand how many thousands of spiritual stations which we have passed beyond in this one chapter alone! And from each spiritual realm beheld we have proffered the reader the main features and highlights (*zubda*) of its gnosis in

41. An unknown correspondent.

42. T 6-7.

43. Meaning: Earth and heaven, this world and the next.

the garb of the mysteries inscribed herein.⁴⁴

Although the more sober nomocentricity of certain mediæval Islamic theological writings such as Muḥammad Ghazālī's *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn* does not appear in the *Tamhīdāt*, its intensely autobiographical style does, in a way, resemble Ghazālī's own autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*. And as in *al-Munqidh*, the author's personality haunts every paragraph with sighs, cries and confessions of human impotence, somewhat reminiscent of Descartes' *Discourse on Method*.⁴⁵ The Persian penchant for flamboyant expression hardly appears in the book: 'Ayn al-Qudāt's prose is intimate and spontaneous, while also quite complex, combining oracular utterance, passionate rapture and the weighty symbolic diction of poetic inspiration, with philosophical depth, prolix theological lore and rich mystical anagogy. Commenting on the poetic polysemy and multi-leveled complexity of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's use of language, T. Izutsu remarked,

In Hamadānī's view, nothing could be further from the truth [than]... that there is a one-to-one correspondence between a word and its meaning. The world of meanings is something of an infinitely delicate, flexible and flowing nature. It has no such rigid stability as corresponds to the formal or material rigidity of words... Compared with the vast field of meaning that lies behind each word, the latter is nothing more than a tiny, insignificant point. The word is but a narrow gate through which the human mind steps into a boundless *sea of meaning*. ...By simply observing from outside the word thus employed, one could hardly judge the width and depth of the meaning that is intended to be conveyed by it. This is particularly true when the meaning that has been poured into the mold of a word happens to be backed by a profound mystical experience.⁴⁶

Some of the following quotations from the *Tamhīdāt* actually

44. T 309, no. 406.

45. Here again, his style reflects Muḥammad Ghazālī, who, as Watt reflected, "introduces his discussions in a manner reminiscent of Descartes." W.M. Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazālī* (London: Allen & Unwin 1953), p. 12.

46. "Mysticism and the Linguistic Problem of Equivocation in the Thought of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī," *Studia Islamica*, XXXI (1970), pp. 157-58. Italics mine.

seem to trace the form of the waves in this 'sea of meaning' – to use Professor Izutsu's analogy. Here we behold the writer adrift and anchorless in God's shoreless ocean, exposing himself as one intoxicated and bereft of self:

There was once a time when the heart of this love-intoxicated author attended and audited his tongue, such that the tongue became the orator and the heart listener. Formerly, I often set out to write things, but for some time now my tongue has been listening to the heart, the heart being orator and the tongue listener. Strange and wondrous are the mystical states and metaphysical 'moments' (*awqāt*) which have, for some time, been revealed to this wretch!⁴⁷

Love's vehement fury (*sawdā*) has made me so bereft-of-self and in passion so enrapt (*bikhwud wa shīfta*) that I don't even know what I am saying. Suddenly the thread of my discourse snaps. Yet I still come out on top, more upright than before. He wrestles with me – until it becomes clear which of the two of us has been thrown down to the ground. But I know that it will be I who will be thrown down – as so many others just like me have been also hurled to the earth. The lovers and those afflicted with love-fervor shall pass away; love-fervor and Love are eternal.⁴⁸

Ah me! That night, the night of the festival, I attained to a place in which I saw everything that was in pre-eternity and all that will be in post-eternity within the letter *alif*. Ah! I need to find someone who can understand what I am saying!⁴⁹

However much I try to flee from the realm of writing, writing pursues me and grabs me by the hand, not allowing me either to abide in what I have written nor to relinquish the act of writing.⁵⁰

In encountering passages such as these it is useful to remind ourselves that ultimately, only the author and his Muse know the truth and meaning of such inspiration. No matter how much we try to analyze and dissect the words of any God-intoxicated mystic, much of

47. T 16.

48. T 237

49. T 347, no. 459.

50. T 324.

what they pronounce will not be within reason's capacity to grasp. Many passages in the *Tamhīdāt* underline the fact that only readers having direct experience of selflessness, and consequently, of 'annihilation', will be able to follow fully the thread of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's exposition. In one place in the text the author boasts that his "utterances can be contained neither in this world, or the next;"⁵¹ in another place (an epistle) he tells his correspondent:

What you understand of this epistle depends upon your own reason and intelligence. To comprehend it deeply would take you many days and require a perfect development (*sulūk*) [in the disciplines of Sufism]. For these writings are the fruit of fifteen years of my own esoteric training (*sulūk*) and what it took me *fifteen years* to understand will not be fathomed by someone else in *fifty years*!⁵²

Elsewhere, explaining the doctrine of welcoming adversity (see below, pp. 325-8) through which the Sufi's 'mystical death' is realized, 'Ayn al-Qudāt tells us that only direct experience of adversity and tribulation can convey his ideas to the aspirant:

Only one who has been wrenched out of selfhood by grief and fear can relish the taste of these words. Did you not hear what one of those Sufis, who attained Union with God, said: "One who knows God is made to suffer extended misfortune and adversity." Ah! it was for this reason that I mentioned above my master's saying, "None knows God but God."

O friend! He alone knows Himself. When the moth *becomes* the candle's flame, what benefit then does flame gain from flame? What joy, what profit comes to it? And yet, when separate from fire, how can it enjoy itself—for how should it endure the company of aught but fire? Reason can never reach this place! If you have [understood] something of that which transcends reason, you will grasp for yourself what we say.⁵³

Stressing the universal truth known to all mystics that (in Blake's words) "the light of the sun when she unfolds it/depends upon the eye that beholds it," 'Ayn al-Qudāt often reminds readers that

understanding his writing depends more on their spiritual sensitivity rather than any philosophical breadth of learning.

Ah! you still are fettered by the passions of your lower soul (*naḥs-i ammāra*) and so cannot hear the recital of these mysteries except with the ear of discursive reason (*gūsh-i qāl*). Wait till your soul converts, becomes Muslim—"My satan became Muslim by my will"⁵⁴—and takes on the heart's hue: then your heart will communicate to you in the language of direct intuition (*hāl*) all that it could not tell you in the tongue of dialectical discourse (*qāl*). Then you will understand how true is the adage that 'the language of *hāl* speaks with superior reason to the language of *qāl*'. Whatever you read [in this book] and cannot comprehend, beg for forgiveness and seek a way to realize its truth. But if you do understand, I wish you good fortune!⁵⁵

This suprarational dimension of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's thought is particularly evident in his exposition of the 'more-than-mortal' Reality of the Prophet Muḥammad. He conceives of the Prophet as having possessed a body in merely a figurative sense, and being, in truth, a spirit totally abstracted from matter. Here, following a complex and esoteric exposition of prophetology in the *Tamhīdāt*, he reiterates the natural incapacity of the non-mystic to analyze his doctrine:

These words are beyond your capacity to understand. What suits your capacity is that you realize that the entire world is but a shadow of Muḥammad. When the sun vanishes, what do you think, does the shadow remain? No, it never remains. "The Day when We shall roll up the heavens as a recorder rolleth up a written scroll." [Koran XXI: 104] Alas! When the body is placed beside divine Reality (*ḥaqīqat*), and takes on its hue, this occurrence portends the extinction of the world. When the Sun of divine Reality sinks into nonexistence, the light of the body is extinguished. I am an infidel if I myself know what I am saying! Alas! If the speaker does not know what he is saying, how can the listener know what he hears?⁵⁶

51. T 209.

52. T, introduction, p. 82.

53. T 282-83, no. 367.

54. Badi' al-Zamān Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī* (Tehran: Dānishgāh-i Tihān 1335 A.Hsh./1956), no. 459.

55. T 196-97.

56. T 239, nos. 326-27.

All those writings of our author—the *Tamhīdāt* in particular—composed during the final five years of his life (between the death of Aḥmad Ghazālī in 1126 and his own execution in 1131) are filled with the consciousness and anticipation of death. There are several places in the *Tamhīdāt*⁵⁷ where ‘Ayn al-Qudāt directly predicts his death, or invokes his future martyrdom, lamenting, with precognizant vision, his own execution. Near the end of the ninth chapter of the *Tamhīdāt*, he relates how a certain bigoted jurist in Baghdad had signed a decree and issued a *fatwā* for his execution (although his imprisonment was still some four years away).⁵⁸ In accordance with his belief in the virtue of resignation to adversity (*balā*) and view of misfortune as God-given grace, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt accepted his fate as enjoined in this unjust legal edict with eloquent irony:

If they ask for a *fatwā* from you, my friend, deliver them one. Let them have your personal adjudication in respect of me. Personally, my will is that anyone asked for their legal pronouncement should write this Koranic verse in response: “To God belongs the Names Most Beautiful/so call to Him by them/and leave the crowd of them who blaspheme His Names.” [VII: 180] As for myself, I pray for such a death [*qatl*: execution] but alas! the time is still distant! When will it happen? Ah! “That is surely no great matter for God.” [XIV: 20]⁵⁹

In order to understand ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s obsession with death and to grasp the intellectual foundations of his doctrine of annihilation, it is necessary to summarize the antecedents of the doctrine of *fanā*’ in the Sufi tradition, which we take up below.

57. Cf. T 236; 250-51; 309, no. 407; 327, n. 428.

58. On which, see also Carl Ernst’s study, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: SUNY Press 1985), p. 111.

59. T 251, no. 329.

III. IN QUEST OF ANNIHILATION: THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND PATH OF DEATH

*’Tis love, not years nor limbs, that can
Make the martyr or the man*

— Richard Crashaw

The essence of the doctrine of annihilation, as it was generally understood by Sufis from the earliest days down to the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries when ‘Alī Hujwīrī (d. 463/1071) and ‘Ayn al-Qudāt flourished, is summed up in the description by Junayd (d. 298/910) of Sufism as “a quality in the mystic which takes up residence.” Pressed to elucidate this quality, Junayd explained, “In essence, it is a quality of God, but outwardly of the Sufi himself. That is, its being demands the annihilation (*fanā*) of the servant’s attributes, which in turn implies subsistence (*baqā*) of God’s attributes. So Sufism is a quality of God even though outwardly it demands constant striving on the Sufi’s part, which is an attribute of the servant.”⁶⁰

The Sufis were careful to guard against advocating “the un-Islamic idea of identifying the human ego with God...and denied both the incarnation of God in man and the total mergence of the individual and finite human ego in God.”⁶¹ Hujwīrī complained that many Sufis grossly misinterpreted the doctrine of *fanā*, “wrongly imagining that annihilation signifies loss of essence and destruction of personality, and that subsistence indicates the subsistence of God in man” and noted that, “both these notions are absurd.”⁶² On the contrary, states Hujwīrī, annihilation is experienced by the mystic “through vision of the majesty of God and through the revelation of Divine omnipotence to his heart, so that in the overwhelming sense of His majesty this world and the next world are obliterated from his mind, and ‘states’ and ‘stations’ appear contemptible in the sight of his aspiring thought...he becomes dead to reason and passion alike,

60. Cited by J. Nurbakhsh, *Sufism: Meaning, Knowledge and Unity* (New York), p. 19.

61. Fazlur Rahman, in EI², s.v. *Bakā*.

62. *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, abridged trans. R.A. Nicholson (London 1936), p. 243.

dead even to annihilation itself, and in that annihilation of annihilation his tongue proclaims God, and his mind and body are humbled and abased."⁶³ He also cautions that "whoever explains these terms otherwise, i.e. annihilation as meaning 'annihilation of substance' and subsistence as meaning 'subsistence of God (in Man)', is a heretic and a Christian."⁶⁴ To Hujwiri, annihilation is a means to knowledge and higher consciousness. Those today who would mistakenly equate *fanā'* with world-weariness, brokenness of spirit, suicidal neurosis or some sort of crude Freudian *thanatos*, will find no evidence to support their interpretation in the *Kashf al-mahjūb*.⁶⁵

The traditional doctrine of annihilation as it is expressed, more or less universally, by Semitic mystics, Christian and Muslim alike, mainly refers to the annihilation of the individual self. In his essay on the 'Intellectual Fraternity' between the European and Asiatic cultures, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy quotes these verses of William Blake:

*I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death
Lest the Last Judgement come and find me unannihilate
And I be seiz'd and giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood.*⁶⁶

Coomaraswamy remarks that the 'quest for annihilation' is a universal aspiration found in all religious traditions, for "one could not find in Asiatic scripture a more typically Asiatic purpose than is revealed in his [Blake's] passionate will to be delivered from the bondage of division." In the *Book of Thel*, William Blake himself has a cloud preach the doctrine of *fanā'* in words as one would expect to have heard from a Rūmī or an Ibn 'Arabi: "O maid, I tell thee, when I pass away/ It is to tenfold life, to love, to peace and raptures holy."

63. *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, p. 246.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 242-3. Traditional interpreters of the doctrine of *fanā'* explicitly reject such pseudo-psychological reductionism. See, e.g. Javad Nurbakhsh, "The Psychology of Annihilation and Subsistence" in Nurbakhsh, *Sufism: Fear and Hope* (New York: KNP 1982), pp. 90ff. Also cf. the remarks of Ḥakīm Tirmidhī concerning the dynamic nature of *fanā'* below, p. 490.

66. A. Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva: Fourteen Indian Essays* (New York 1924), p. 113. The verses belong to Blake's epic poem *Milton*, XIV: 21, in G. Keynes (ed.) *Blake: Complete Writings* (London: Oxford University Press 1972), p. 495.

Similar expressions of this doctrine occur in the English metaphysical poets: in particular John Donne and Richard Crashaw, as well as in the Catholic mystical poet, San Juan de la Cruz. According to this Spanish friend of God, the spiritual method of the Christian mystic "demands only the one thing necessary: true self-denial, exterior and interior, through surrender of self both to suffering for Christ and to *annihilation in all things*." Thus the mystic should realize that "the greatness of the work he accomplishes will be measured by his annihilation for God in the sensory and spiritual parts of his soul. When he is brought to nothing, the highest degree of humility, the spiritual union between his soul and God will be effected. This union is the most noble and sublime state attainable in this life."⁶⁷

If 'selflessness' is chamberlain to vision of God, it is the 'self' which is the main obstacle on the path of annihilation.⁶⁸ It is also in terms of transcendental doctrines such as annihilation that mystics of diverse religions unite on common ground. R.A. Nicholson's observation, that "the Moslem's conception of personality is different from ours. In Islam God, not man, is the measure of things"⁶⁹ — although true in respect to Western humanist thought, in respect to *Western mysticism*, as the above quotations show, is obviously quite mistaken, for the realization of 'annihilation of self' is the true "measure of things" in all mysticism, whether Oriental or

67. "The Ascent of Mount Carmel" translated by K. Kavanaugh & O. Rodriguez, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (Washington: ICS 1979), pp. 124-25. (Italics in the above passage are mine). For a good exposition of San Juan de la Cruz's ideas about mystical death, see George Tavard, *Poetry and Contemplation in St. John of the Cross* (Ohio University Press 1988), pp. 203-207. For a discussion of the influence of Persian Sufism on his thought, see Luce López Baralt, *San Juan de la Cruz y el Islam: Estudio sobre las filiaciones semíticas de su literatura mística*. (Puerto Rico 1985).

68. In the words of the modern Catholic mystical thinker Simone Weil: "Humility is the refusal to exist outside God. The self is only the shadow which sin and error cast by stopping the light of God, and I take this shadow for a being. ...All the things that I see, hear, breathe, touch, eat; all the beings I meet—I deprive the sum total of all that contact with God, and I deprive God of contact with all that in so far as something in me says 'I.'— *Gravity and Grace*, translated by E. Craufurd (London: ARK 1987), pp. 35-36.

69. *The Idea of Personality in Sufism* (Cambridge University Press 1922, reprinted Lahore 1970), p. 100.

Occidental.

'Ayn al-Qudāt's doctrine of annihilation is likewise based on the destruction of the lower soul. Without annihilation of the ego, spiritual consciousness cannot exist. In the language of theology, one cannot be said to possess a soul unless one passes beyond the level of "There is no god..." (*Lā ilāha*) and reaches the level of "but God" (*illā 'llāh*). Thus, the process of 'raising consciousness' consists paradoxically in negating selfhood. This path of negation, like the Pseudo-Dionysian *via negativa* or the *noche oscura* of San Juan de la Cruz, is fraught with danger, for, as our philosopher pronounces, the "whole world is caught up in the realm of negation (*Lā ilāha*), wherein a hundred thousand souls have been bereft of their soul. On this Path, only one who reaches affirmation (*illā 'llāh*) possesses a soul; one barred from this degree possesses none of the soul's perfections."⁷⁰

Emphasizing the centrality of Sufi discipline in his thought, 'Ayn al-Qudāt notes that such annihilation and self-effacement is purely the product of discipleship. Thus, "the highest blessing for the seeker of Truth," he declares in the *Zubdat*, "is to exert himself wholeheartedly in the service of a man who has *annihilated* himself in God and the vision of God. And when he has passed his life serving his master, God will quicken him with a pure life; nothing of this is known to the rest of the 'ulamā' aside from an empty name and a hollow form."⁷¹

In bringing the disciple to realize and to accept this 'annihilation of self', the part played by the spiritual master is similar to that of the Koran. Here, one is reminded of Rūmī's advice to aspirants to "inquire as to the meaning of the Koran solely from the Koran itself, or else from one who has set fire to his selfish passions. One who has immolated himself upon the Koran, and become abased, so that his spirit in essence has *become* the Koran."⁷² In the following passage, 'Ayn al-Qudāt even goes so far as to describe the ideal disciple as one who "loses himself in the master." If, in his exposition below,

70. T 75.

71. T introduction, p. 71.

72. R.A. Nicholson (ed.), *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'd-dīn Rūmī* (London & Leiden 1925-40; repr. London 1982), Bk. V: 3128-29.

the verbs may differ (that is, 'to lose oneself' is used in lieu of 'to annihilate oneself'), the meaning is still the same: the mystic must die to selfhood through love of God—a love which is beheld in the mirror of the spiritual guide:

The more I write about it, the more complicated the issue becomes [yet there is no alternative]: know that, in general terms, the disciple (*murīd*) is one who loses himself in the master (*dar pīr bāzad*). First, he loses his religion and then, himself. Do you know the meaning of 'losing one's religion'? It means that if the spiritual master commands him to contradict and disregard the dictates of his own religion, the disciple obeys. If the disciple, in order to conform with his master's directives, does not act contrary to his own religion, he is still a disciple of his own personal religion, not his master's disciple.

If the disciple pursues the course of his own desires, he is a self-worshipper and an egotist. Discipleship is to adore the master (*murīdī pīr parastī buwad*) and to gird oneself with the cincture of Almighty God and his Prophet (peace be upon him!)

...This writing is so extremely complicated that finding someone who understands it on the face of the earth is extremely rare, for among the thousands of spiritual aspirants who wholeheartedly pursue the Path of God, only one is ever brought into the narrow straits of disciplic devotion (*irādat*).

...In the whole world I seek one disciple whose skin I can stuff with straw and then yoke it up and hang him from the sun's round disc so that the folk of the world may take heed. ...If I find an aspirant [on the Sufi Path] to suit my heart's wishes, and if he lives according to my rule for two or three years—no less—I can reveal to him the verity of these spiritual truths.⁷³

The mysticism of the 'Light of Muḥammad' as it was espoused by Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896) and his disciple Ḥallāj (d. 922) also appears fully developed in the *Tamhīdāt*: the entire book is very much in the tradition of Ḥallāj's esoteric *imitatio Muhammadi*,⁷⁴ and could be described as one long love poem elaborating the Judge of Hamadhān's passionate love for the spiritual reality of the Prophet. The book is full of descriptions of his visions of Muḥammad, and it

73. T, introduction, pp. 98-99.

74. See A. Schimmel, "The Light of Muhammad" in *And Muhammad is His Messenger* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1985), pp. 32, 124-29.

is rare to find a passage whose essential ideas or whose outer expressions do not focus on the *Ḥadīth*. According to 'Ayn al-Qudāt, all self-knowledge depends upon knowing 'the soul of Muḥammad'. Whoever desires to acquire gnosis (*ma'rifa*) of the Divine Essence, must make the "soul of his reality (*nafs-i ḥaqīqat-i khwud*) into a mirror and gaze therein," where, he explains, "the mystic will recognize the soul of Muḥammad."⁷⁵ So behind all epistemology lies prophetology.

Weaving the metaphors of annihilation and intoxication into the warp of the Koranic tapestry while expounding the mystical doctrine that 'the Kingdom of Heaven is within you', the following passages expound the oft-reiterated idea that 'Sufism is selflessness', and are particularly good examples of the densely Koranic style of the *Tamhidāt*:

O friend! When the wayfarer settles down in the city of servanthood (*'ubūdiyyat*) which is his own heart, he enters Paradise. "Enter thou among My servants! Enter thou My paradise" [Koran LXXXIX: 29-30]. In this Paradise he is asked, "Do you desire anything from Me?" He replies, "O Lord, we desire annihilation and selflessness from you." So a wine from the liqueurs of divine Union and intimacy is poured into his inner being so that every place it spills, its alchemical transformation works upon him. The Koranic expression "a pure wine" [LXXVI: 21] alludes to this.⁷⁶

* * *

When God wills that we view ourselves within His Light—"Have they not considered the dominion of the heavens and the earth" [Koran VII: 185]—His light invades and ravages the soul of the spiritual pilgrim. "Lo! Kings, when they enter a township, ruin it." [XXVII: 34] Laying hand onto the raft of God's Being, the pilgrim's soul tries to save itself. "Doth not thy Lord suffice, since He is Witness over all things? How is it? Are they still in doubt about the encounter with their Lord? Lo! does He not encompass everything?" [XLI: 53-54] So our being is entirely absorbed and swallowed in the omnipresence of His Light. "Vision comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth all

vision." [VI: 103]

In this station a man realizes what it means to behold his own being [reflected] in the mirror of the Light of the Eternal (*nūr-i šamādī*). Call me an infidel if I have not seen it myself. The exposition of this mystical state by the Prophet Muḥammad in saying "Whoever has seen me, has seen God," becomes apparent at this sublime spiritual station. And do not the exclamations of Ḥallāj and Bāyazīd⁷⁷ have the same significance?⁷⁸

As in all traditional Sufism, the Koran and Koranically-based contemplative disciplines⁷⁹ also play a central role in 'Ayn al-Qudāt's mystical theology. The following passage, in which the numinous rhythms of Koranic Arabic accompany the melodious Persian as a kind of chorale, reads as a virtual 'hymn to annihilation'. Employing theological language in interpreting the esoteric meaning of the ritual prayer, 'Ayn al-Qudāt describes his experience of 'annihilation in prayer':

Have you ever seen the existence of both the terrestrial and celestial worlds (*mulk u malakūt*) obliterated in [the recitation of] *Allāh akbar*? Have you ever witnessed 'establishment' (*ithbat*) after 'obliteration' (*maḥw*) in the act of magnifying God (*takbīr*)? Have you ever given thanks for the grace of 'establishment-after-obliteration' in uttering "Boundless Praise belongs to God" (*al-ḥamdu lillāh kathīran*)? ...When a man becomes effaced in "and I am not one of the idolaters," [Koran VI: 79] what meaning at this point can polytheistic dualism have? How can one who understands that "All that dwells upon the earth is perishing" [Koran LV: 26] ever be a polytheist?⁸⁰

Elsewhere 'Ayn al-Qudāt describes the experience of being encompassed by the Koran, becoming the point under the *bā'* of the *basmala*, which leads him to elaborate, with forceful lucidity, a theory of 'annihilation in the Koran':

Alas! In the Koran we see nothing but black letters upon white paper. As long as you are 'in existence' (*dar wujūd*), nothing but

75. T 58.

76. T 291-92, no. 383.

77. "I am the Truth" and "Lord, how great is my glory." See above, p. xvii.

78. T 273-74, nos. 357-359.

79. On which, see Muhammad Isa Waley's study below, pp. 497-552.

80. T 84-85.

black and white is seen; when you depart from 'existence' the Word of God (*kalām Allāh*, i.e. the Koran) will obliterate you in its own being and then will bring you forth from obliteration into consolidation (*ithbāt*). Having realized consolidation you will see no more blackness — all you behold is white. So read the verse: "With God is the source of the Book." [XIII: 39] O Cavalier, the Koran was sent down to mankind swathed in many thousands of veils. If the majesty of the dot under the *bā* of the *basmala* were to fall upon the earth or the heavens, both would immediately disintegrate and melt away, for "If We had caused this Koran to descend upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God." [LIX: 21]⁸¹

Only when "obliterated in beauteous *lumen gloriae* of the Koran," says 'Ayn al-Qudāt in the introductory chapter of the *Tamhīdāt*, can the Sufi realize that there is a 'Reality-beyond-Humanity' (*juz in bashariyyat haqiqatī digar[ast]*) which is the goal of his devotion:

One who confesses [his faith in] the Scripture beholds the bride of the Koran's spiritual beauty... perceiving with pure translucence its seven layers of meaning and while having attained to "With Him is the source of the Scripture," [XIII: 39] he understands the Koran's meaning. He becomes so drowned and effaced in its light that neither the Koran is left nor its reciter; rather, all that remains is the [transcendent] recitation and inscription.⁸²

So central is the Koran's revelation to 'Ayn al-Qudāt's inspiration, that his consciousness often appears entirely immersed in the sacred text, from which he quotes as often as five times in one sentence. Thus, in an account of another experience of 'annihilation in the Koran', the contemplative is described as envisioning the Sacred Scripture being re-composed from *within* his soul. The Divine Calligrapher, he says, inscribes the verse, 'Nūn. By the Pen...' upon the 'slate of the heart' of the adept. Both gnosis of and faith in the Koranic revelation depends on the mystic's interior attainment to 'the Library' of the pre-eternal 'Light of Muḥammad.' At that point, says 'Ayn al-Qudāt, will "The Instructor of 'God taught me

courtesy, so how beauteous is my courtesy' [*Hadīth*] write the Koran without intermediary upon the slate of your heart."⁸³

Of course, there is no such thing as annihilation for its own sake, for the purpose of following the *via negativa* is to realize a transcendental knowledge beyond the veils of selfhood. Using a poetic simile, first popularized by Ḥallāj, of the passionate self-immolation of the moth upon the candle, 'Ayn al-Qudāt describes this type of annihilation as a 'love unto death':

My friend, the moth's nourishment is provided by his love for the flame, for without fire the moth is distraught. The moth does not obtain life through fire until fire so completely transfigures him that he beholds the entire world to be fire. ... When the moth hurls itself into the fire, it is totally consumed, becoming itself all fire. Of self what awareness could it possess? As long as the moth abided with its 'self' it was fettered and 'hung-up'. Now, it beholds 'love' and love possesses such an [attractive] power that when love is commingled with the Beloved, the Beloved draws the lover to herself and devours him. The fire of love gives both power and nutriment to the moth. The lover is the moth and the beloved is the candle which bestows such power and nutriment to it [the moth]. Seeking these things, the moth hurls itself upon the flame. The candle-flame, that is, the beloved, commences to burn the moth, until the entire candle becomes fire: neither love nor moth remains.⁸⁴

Having dissolved itself in fire, the lover realizes like Rūmī

*I have tested it: death is in life
When I die, arrives Eternal life.*

At this juncture it is necessary to digress slightly, from the sublimity of mystical annihilation to the lowlands of common religious faith, because to understand the zenith of the doctrine of *fanā* one must first comprehend 'Ayn al-Qudāt's doctrine of 'real infidelity', which is the substratum of his concept of 'annihilation in spiritual poverty'. Our discussion here will be restricted in scope because his writings on this theme have already been extensively analyzed by

81. T 172-73.

82. T 3-4.

83. T 174.

84. T 99-100.

scholars elsewhere.⁸⁵

The common cleric, 'Ayn al-Qudāt asserts, is inwardly but an infidel. Citing Koran XII: 106, "And most of them believe not in God except that they attribute partners unto Him," he concludes, "So you see, God says that most believers are infidels."⁸⁶ 'Ayn al-Qudāt believed that most so-called Muslims who styled themselves 'believers' were, in fact, infidels in their hidden hearts. By 'infidels' here he wishes to imply that their confession of 'faith' is a mere formality, based upon imitation and reason rather than vision and revelation, and, as far as the external letter of the Law goes, although they may pass as 'believers', *vis-à-vis* the Spirit and Reality they are but 'infidels':

If a single religion (*madhhab*) could guide a man to God, it would be the religion of Islam, but if this religion [Islam] provides no higher consciousness to the aspirant, then such a religion is worse than infidelity (*kufr*) in God's eyes. According to the wayfarers on the Sufi Path, 'Islam' signifies that which brings a man to God and 'infidelity' refers to that which impedes the seeker and causes him to be perfunctory in his quest.

Beware! Do not think that the Judge of Hamadān is saying that infidelity is good and Islam is not so. God forbid! *I praise neither infidelity or Islam! O friend, whatever brings a man to God is Islam and whatever debars a man from the way to God is infidelity.* And the truth is that the mystical wayfarer can never put either infidelity or Islam behind him, for infidelity and Islam are two mystical states from which the seeker never escapes so long as he is 'with himself'. When liberated from selfhood, however, neither infidelity nor Islam will ever catch up with you should they come running after you!⁸⁷

From this visionary standpoint, as Carl Ernst points out, 'infidelity' becomes something "all-pervasive, the process of spiritual *takfir*, i.e. the recognition of *kufr* in oneself and the consequent self-accusation, has an inherent momentum towards transcendence, a longing

85. See Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, Part II, C, and Peter Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1983), pp. 134-50.

86. T 204, no. 263.

87. T 23, 25.

for completion analogous to Platonic *eros* or Aristotelian *orexis*... Thus the path of infidelity is the path of progressive self-annihilation."⁸⁸ The subject of infidelity is treated extensively in the ninth chapter of the *Tamhidāt*, entitled "Elucidation of the Reality of Faith and Infidelity"—a kind of critique of formal religion from the transcendent perspective of visionary Sufism, and perhaps the most daring attack on religious reductionism, dogmatism and clerical exotericism in the whole history of Islamic Sufism.

The Judge of Hamadān here discerns four different levels of infidelity beheld as visions the soul has of itself in its ascent towards Faith. When the all-pervasive *existential* actuality of infidelity becomes apparent to the gnostic, all the negative charge and connotation of *kufr* is dissolved, so that infidelity loses its pejorative significance and becomes inverted in meaning to connote the pure sincerity of heart held by the true lover. 'Infidelity', thus turned inside out, becomes transfigured and exalted into a sublime spiritual rank. Here 'Ayn al-Qudāt asks rhetorically, "Do you think it insignificant or a small thing to become conscious of infidelity? Did you never hear that Muḥammad always supplicated, 'O Lord, I seek refuge in Thee from hidden polytheism'?"⁸⁹ According to his doctrine, infidelity is a spiritual fact of life, escape from which is only possible once one admits its presence within the psyche. 'Ayn al-Qudāt's formulation of the theory of the four hierarchical levels of infidelity, demonstrating the intimate connection between infidelity, spiritual poverty and annihilation in God, is based on this paradoxical view of the relativity of faith and infidelity.

Among the worlds through which the wayfarers [on the Sufi Path] pass, one type of infidelity is termed 'majestic' (*jalālī*) and another type is said to be 'beautiful' (*jamālī*). Ah! my friend! Now hear the description of the 'divine infidelity' (*kufr-i ilahī*).

Look carefully, until the first infidelity⁹⁰ becomes manifest

88. Ernst, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

89. T 213. 'Hidden polytheism' (*shirk-i khafī*) alludes to *kufr-i nafs*, on which, see below.

90. The author's reference here is to the fourfold hierarchical division expounded earlier on, of the 'types of infidelity'; these are, respectively: outer infidelity (*kufr-i zāhir*), the soul's infidelity (*kufr-i nafs*), the heart's infidelity (*kufr-i qalb*), and the infidelity of the divine Reality (*kufr-i haqīqat*).

to you. Proceed on until you find Faith (*īmān*). Then renounce yourself until you perceive the second and third types of infidelity.⁹¹ Next, rend your soul to shreds until you attain the fourth type of infidelity. Here you become a true believer (*mū'min*).⁹² At this point the verse "And most of them believe not in God except that they attribute partners to Him," [Koran XII: 106] will show you what true Faith is. Here the verse, "Lo! I have turned my face towards Him who created the heavens and the earth, as one by nature upright, and I am not one of the idolaters,"⁹³ will be displayed to you. The 'self' of yourself will then be hurled against the 'Self' of Himself, until you become all Him. Here spiritual poverty (*faqr*) appears to you, and the truth of the adage: "When poverty is complete, God is present" becomes apparent—meaning that you become entirely Him.

Is this 'infidelity', or not? What do you say? This experience is what the Prophetic tradition: "Poverty approaches the point of infidelity"⁹⁴ alludes to. Here Divine Oneness (*tawhīd*) is realized. And is this not the meaning of Hallāj's verse:

*In the religion of God I have become an infidel.
But upon me infidelity is incumbent,
Even if unto the Muslims it be hateful.*⁹⁵

Thus, the summit of the mystic's aspiration is to attain the level of 'real infidelity' where the duality of the human and divine personalities are dissolved, and 'annihilation in spiritual poverty' is realized. Obviously, because this doctrine would appear as heretical to Muslim exotericists and Mullas, it was best characterized as a 'divine infidelity.'

Although 'Ayn al-Qudāt did recognize that his religion of 'real infidelity' could not present a credible public face, nor gain for itself a place in the hearts of the fanatic clerics of his day, notwithstanding

91. I.e. Infidelity of the soul and infidelity of the heart.

92. I.e. When Selfhood is obliterated in God, one realizes the 'Reality-of-infidelity'; belief in the true sense of the word, beyond all taint of self-centeredness and hypocrisy, only begins here.

93. The words spoken by Abraham in the act of repenting from star-worship.

94. For a comprehensive analysis of these and other traditions cited in this passage concerning *faqr*, see Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, *Spiritual Poverty in Sufism* (transl. Leonard Lewisohn), (London: KNP 1984), chap. 1.

95. T 214-15.

his avowed despair of the limited intellectual scope of twelfth-century Academe, he dared to compose the ninth chapter of the *Tamhīdāt* as an "Exposé of the Reality of Faith and Infidelity." In the first few pages of this chapter he predicts his own martyrdom, laments the necessity for sobriety and temperance in love, and explains why sincerity requires the Sufis, or at least the bolder visionaries amongst them, to acknowledge their inner infidelity (*shirk-i khafi*) before God and confess their religious hypocrisy. The Sufi descends into 'infidelity' voluntarily because the journey from 'false Islam' to the land of Faith can only be made upon the road of Infidelity:

There is a group of spiritual wayfarers who are driven crazy by [contact with] the divine Reality (*diwāna-i haqiqat*). Now the founding father [the Prophet Muḥammad] of the religious Law (*sharī'a*) perceived through the Light of Prophecy that madmen must be chained and fettered, so he made the Law their chain. Ah! did you never hear of that great mystic who directed his disciple, "You may behave with God as one demented, but act straight and sober with Muḥammad"?

...The wayfarers to the Supernal Presence are of diverse types and arts. Some realized their religion through direct vision: beholding the reality of things and themselves, they saw that in fact they were girded with a cincture.⁹⁶ They desired that their outer and inner being should be in concordance, so they girded that same cincture around their bodies as well. Their idea was this: since their inner being – the locus of Divinity – is filled with infamy and error, what substantial difference would it make if their outer being or body – the focus of society's attention – were to don the cincture as well?

Still another group, the drunkards, arose. They bound the cincture about themselves, discoursing with words of intoxication. Some were slain, others afflicted by His jealousy, as I myself, alas, will be! I know not when it will come to pass. As yet the hour is distant."⁹⁷

96. *Zunnār*: this may mean here both the cord which Zoroastrians tied around their waist as well as the cord which Christians, as an officially protected minority under Muslim rule, were formerly required to wear to distinguish themselves from the Muslim majority. For the exoteric Mullas, it was a symbol of religious infidelity.

97. T 204-06.

To recapitulate our discussion above, 'Ayn al-Qudāt's doctrine of annihilation is based on several key principles which work simultaneously to effect within the Sufi a state of 'unveiling' and selflessness.

First, Ayn al-Qudāt exhorts his reader to serve a master who has annihilated himself in God, losing his ego in a life of service on the Spiritual Path. Discipleship, in 'Ayn al-Qudāt's understanding, leads to effacement in God and annihilation in the spirit of the Koran's inspiration.

Second, there is 'annihilation in the Prophet': Muḥammad being visualized as a sun, and all creation as the shadow of the light of his inspiration.

Following this adherence to the Prophet comes 'annihilation in prayer': at this level certain Koranic verses ravish the mystic with their supra-formal meanings, intoxicating him with the divine vision within the "Paradise of the heart."

Lastly, the stage of 'annihilation in spiritual poverty' supervenes. This is the level of 'real infidelity' where the temporal self and the duality of the human and divine personalities are obliterated. Since 'infidelity' is a higher form of faith and the perfection of spiritual poverty is the final goal of Sufism, the Sufi finds himself absorbed in God, and although utterly poor and annihilated, subsists in a pure emptiness wherein nothing remains to veil him from the Beloved.

IV. IMAGINALIZATION OF DEATH IN THE REALM OF ANNIHILATION

Special attention has been given so far to 'Ayn al-Qudāt's concept of the relativity of faith and his doctrine of 'real infidelity', his immersion in the sacred text of the Koran and his belief that all knowledge depends upon knowing the "soul of Muḥammad." In this section, we examine the interiorized view of the Afterlife found in the *Tamhīdāt* in order to explore the 'realm of annihilation' wherein the Sufi realizes the reality of death.

Five basic concepts are found in 'Ayn al-Qudāt's doctrine of mystical death. Once these are expounded, his theopathic statements on the matter appear somewhat more comprehensible, even if, ultimately, what he says will always be 'over our heads', because

Sufism must be experienced through 'unveiling'; mere intellectual analysis brings us only to the threshold, not across it.

i. 'Ayn al-Qudāt views human beings as essentially different in spiritual capacity from one another. Thus, according to his mystical anthropology, only the most advanced adepts among the Sufis will ever attain the 'Realm of Annihilation'.

ii. Epistemologically speaking, annihilation can only be realized through 'selflessness': that is, through enravishment from self by the divine Essence.

iii. Annihilation and death are spiritual, not corporeal, facts. God, says the Judge of Hamadhān, does not fix His regard on the body, but only on the soul.

iv. Pain born of divine love is preferable to pleasure experienced by the soul estranged from the Beloved (this was the doctrine of *balā*, 'adversity', formulated two centuries earlier by Junayd).

v. The reality of death and the circumstances of *fanā* are comprehensible to the mind only through the 'science of similitudes' and analogies – what 'Ayn al-Qudāt calls 'imaginalization'.

These concepts will be discussed below in the order mentioned above:

i. In the *Tamhīdāt* 'Ayn al-Qudāt speaks of a certain experience of death which overwhelmed him, describing how he was caught up in the 'highest heaven', the 'Paradise of Sanctity', for an entire month. Everyone imagined that he had died and then

They sent me forth from that Paradise, with great aversion, to another spiritual station. In this second station, a sin came into being through me, the chastisement for which will be that in a few seasons you will see me killed. What do you say? See what adversity is visited upon the head of someone who hinders a lover from reaching his beloved!⁹⁸

98. T 232.

The rival whom 'Ayn al-Qudāt here rails against is quite obviously his own carnal nature or *tab'*, whose interference he bemoans. Missing on this experience, he reflects that it is like being caught between two jealous mistresses—if he attends to one, the other will murder him. He introduces these two metaphysical mistresses as the 'Light of Muḥammad' and the 'Light of Iblis', both of which continually accompany the Sufi wayfarer, unto the very end of the Path.⁹⁹

Whoever is subjected to affliction and left half-dead in the world of Satan will be revived and cured in the world of Muḥammad. This is because infidelity (*kufr*) has annihilation (*fanā'*) as its hallmark whereas Faith carries the emblem of Subsistence (*baqā'*). Without the presence of annihilation, there is no subsistence. The more annihilation there is on the Spiritual Path, the greater and more perfect is the mystic's subsistence.¹⁰⁰

Both Carl Ernst and Peter Awn have shown that 'Ayn al-Qudāt viewed Iblis as a complementary rather than a polar reality to God. This Satanic-Divine complementarity which pervades all creation underlies 'Ayn al-Qudāt's unique anthropology, according to which humankind is divided into three basic types.¹⁰¹ The threefold hierarchy is traced back to the Koran, all three groups being mentioned in Koran XXXV: 32 according to his exegesis. On the first, the lowest, level appears 'animal man and woman';¹⁰² those at this level are endowed with the form and shadow of humankind but lack the reality and substance on humanity. Being unable to fathom the meaning of divine Revelation, Faith or Prophecy,¹⁰³ such people inhabit the 'animal realm' (*'ālam-i ḥayawānī*)¹⁰⁴ and know neither faith nor infidelity.¹⁰⁵

The second tier is inhabited by spiritual men/women, also referred to in various places in the Koran,¹⁰⁶ who possess both the

human form and the spiritual reality of humanity. These are the "chosen elect of God" and being endowed with gnosis, "priceless and precious is the pearl of their humanity."¹⁰⁷ Despite their exalted station, they are still among the devotees the Koran calls "lukewarm (*muqtaṣidūn*)" among God's bondsmen. These are the 'infidels of the spirit,' as 'Ayn al-Qudāt explains:

"And of them are some who are lukewarm" [XXXV: 32] — for the infidel (*kāfir*) is called 'lukewarm'. Ah! How can you understand this? Infidelity (*kufr*) is the intermediate station [on the path] of Devotion (*'ubūdiyyat*), a mystical state experienced at the midpoint of the Way. The ultimate point in [divine] Guidance (*hidāyat*) is but midway in relation to [the divine] Misguidance (*dilālat*). Misguidance is juxtaposed to Guidance, insofar as God "guides whom He wills and misguides whom He wills."

One day our master was saying his prayers and during the statement of his intention (*niyya*) exclaimed, "I have become an infidel and girded myself with a cincture. God is Most High!" When he finished his prayers, he remarked, "O Muḥammad, you have not yet attained to the midpoint of Devotion; they have not yet let you enter behind the curtain of 'By Thy Might, I will surely beguile them every one' [Koran XXXVIII: 82]. Wait, until the veil is lifted!"

...I don't know what you have understood about infidelity! There are many different types of infidelity, for many are the stages which the wayfarer must traverse. Each moment of the spiritual path it is necessary and required that the traveller face faith and infidelity. For as long as the wayfarer is conscious of himself and is still some 'thing' to himself, he will not be liberated from the hand of "and surely I will lead them astray." [the words of Iblis to God, Koran IV: 119] ...On this Path there is no more distressing adversity than your existence (*wujūd-i tū*) and no poison more deadly than the desires of disciples.¹⁰⁸

Of the inhabitants of the third tier of humanity, 'Ayn al-Qudāt admits that only symbolic allusions can be made, for although they have realized the kernel (*lubb*) of religion, they are protected by divine Jealousy. "Of this saintly company," he remarks, "people

99. T 30, no. 43. See also, Awn, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

100. T 233, no. 302.

101. T 39. *Ādamiyān bar sih gūna fiṭrat āfarīda shuda-ānd.*

102. T 47

103. According to the author, mention of this lower class appears in the Koran in various places, e.g. VII: 179; XLIII: 83; LXX: 42; LXXXIII: 14-15; X: 41; XI: 188; II: 6; VI: 25.

104. T 39.

105. T 47.

106. E.g. XVII: 7; XXXV: III: 29; II: 87.

107. T 41-42.

108. T 48-50.

comprehend no further portion than a simile (*tashbīh*) and an analogy (*tamthīl*);”¹⁰⁹ only the mystic who fathoms the spiritual level and station of Muḥammad is can comprehend the sublime level of this company.¹¹⁰ The three signs of Prophecy (the power to break natural laws and work miracles; direct vision of the Hereafter and its affairs; and vision, in the waking state, of the imaginal realm beheld by the mass of humankind only in dreams) are possessed by the adepts of the third tier in the form of *karāmat*, *futūh*, and *wāqī‘a*.¹¹¹ Here, in the most exalted level of his hierarchy, says the Judge of Hamadān, also lies ‘the Realm of Annihilation’:

When God’s pre-eternal favour wills that the wayfarer be engaged in the heart’s ascension (*mi‘rāj-i qalb*), He sends a ray from the flame of “It is the fire of God kindled, which leaps up over the hearts...” [Koran CIV: 6-7] to strike him. Struck by this flaming ray the wayfarer sloughs the skin of humanity and exits from the domain of humankind. The experience of this mystical state makes the wayfarer realize the significance of [the verse] “Every soul will taste of death” [III: 185; XXI: 35; XXIX: 57] and the meaning of death on the *via mystica*. Then the truth of “All that dwells upon the earth is in annihilation” [cf. LV: 26] is revealed to him and he passes beyond the place where “upon that day the earth shall be changed to other than the earth,” [XIV: 48] and reaches the frontier of the *Realm of Annihilation*. Here the solace of death is presented to him. As he is subjected to this experience, quite without his volition, he renounces all hope and severs his connection with all creation and people. At this juncture the circumstances of the Resurrection are shown to him.¹¹²

‘Ayn al-Qudāt makes an interesting observation concerning this third and highest tier of humanity. Having realized the meaning of the verse “and [they] have certainty in the Hereafter,” (Koran II: 4) such mystics understand why God said to Muḥammad, “Thou knewest not what the Scripture was, nor what the Faith.” (XLII: 52). According to ‘Ayn al-Qudāt:

The Prophet was brought with aversion into the realm of the Scripture and Faith for the benefit and grace of people... else, how wide the gap between him and absence from that [Transcendent] Presence [which entailed] the duties of apostleship and [instruction of people in] the Scripture.

Alas, in the realm of Certitude the wayfarer beholds himself as utterly obliterated and sees God as ‘the Terminator.’ He has surpassed “God obliterates what He wills” [Koran XIII: 39] and has confirmed the truth of “He establishes what He wills” [XIII: 39], so that Subsistence [in God] (*baqā‘*) is vouchsafed to him as this station. Then the people of establishment and obliteration (*ahl-i ithbāt wa maḥw*) display Reality to his sight. One who has realized this knows ‘establishment’ (*ithbāt*) rather than obliteration, and he leaves those characterized by obliteration trailing far behind.

Herein one discovers the infinite and interminable nature of all these spiritual stations and degrees, each individual ending up at the particular degree which befits him. The verse, “No soul knows what land it shall die in” [XXXII: 34] expresses this. Ah! – What horror this verse brings to me! Hear what Muḥammad said concerning this: “Many are the valleys and ravines in the heart of man, and in each of these lie gorges. Whoever lets himself follow and course down the paths into the gorges, God cares not in which valley he perishes.” And in another place [*Hadīth*] he said, “The heart is like a feather in the desert which the wind wafts hither and thither.”¹¹³

The wind of the Mercy of pre-eternal Love spins the heart about in its own domain until at last it finds peace in one place and abides therein. For the heart itself is ‘an alternator’ (*mutaqallib-ast ya‘nī gardanda-ast*) which never ceases its rotation. Dear friend! Whenever God wishes to seize the spirit of a wayfarer [i.e. cause him to die] at a certain place, He causes him to need and desire that place. Whenever the wayfarer’s nostalgic heart is brought to halt in a certain domain, his spirit is taken away from him and he is made to need and desire that land and station so that he stoops to it and contents himself with it.”¹¹⁴

In the realm of annihilation (*‘ālam-i fanā‘*) all wayfarers are

109. T 43.

110. T 45, no. 62.

111. Y 46.

112. T 51-52.

113. Badī‘ al-Zamān Furūzānfar (*Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī*, no. 219) provides four versions of this *Hadīth*. See also R.A. Nicholson’s commentary on the *Mathnawī*, III 1643.

114. T 53-54.

fellow travellers and companions for "all that dwells upon the face of the earth is in annihilation (*fān*). " [Koran LV: 26] But what is the situation of those brought to the world of subsistence (*'ālam-i baqā*)? How will they find themselves again [after experiencing annihilation] and where will each of them settle down? The verse, "Yet still abides the Face of thy Lord, in Might and Glory" [LV: 27] has such a meaning. The verse: "And none of us is there but has a known station" [XXXVII: 164] may be presented as an [acceptable] apology on behalf of all the wayfarers, for it demonstrates the extreme limit of each aspirant's spiritual realization.

Dear friend, what of this "earth" (*arḍ*)¹¹⁵ have you understood? "The earth is God's and He bequeaths it to whom He will" [VII 128]. This "earth" is not this terrestrial ground, for this ground shall suffer annihilation (*fanā dārād*) and annihilation does not besuit the Creator and the Eternal Being. The "earth" intended here is the ground of Paradise and the Heart... When the Ground of Perishable Annihilation (*fanā*) and bodily form (*qālib*) is transformed into the Ground of the Heart and Eternity, a man attains to the degree wherein he beholds the glorious earth in a single atom and within every atom a glorious and wondrous earth.¹¹⁶

Hence, when the mystic attains to the third tier of sainthood, the Realm of Annihilation is revealed to him and the veil over the Hereafter is lifted.

ii. The conceptual framework of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's epistemology here is based on the doctrine of 'visionary unveiling' (*kashf*) expounded by the Muslim mystics. From the exoteric perspective of Islamic theology, the Muslim is defined as one who adheres unquestioningly to certain religious tenets, viz. the existence of the angels, the Resurrection, the vision of God in the Hereafter, the questioning by the two recording angels in the grave, etc. However, the Sufis, who introduced themselves as the 'brethren of visionary unveiling and direct perception' (*ahl-i kashf wa shuhūd*), felt a more intimate understanding and realization of their faith to be indispensable to the

development of the spiritual life. Interpreting Surah III: 18, "Allah Himself is Witness that there is no God save Him, and the angels and the men of learning (too are witness), maintaining His creation in justice," 'Ayn al-Qudāt exclaims:

Do you imagine that faith (*īmān*) is in the Unseen (*ghayb*)? No, the faith of the unitarians is in the direct vision of the Seen. In Faith the lineaments of extrinsic difference (*ghayriyyat*) in respect to the angels and the men of learning are discarded. Everything becomes "God is Witness..."¹¹⁷ It becomes apparent to the wayfarer that [the verse of Koran IV: 136]: "O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger" states that besides this [exoteric] faith, one must have another type of faith. Now, what would be the inverse of this statement? It would be that beyond this infidelity, exists another infidelity. That is [the meaning of]: "And whosoever has faith in God, He guides his heart." [LXIV 11] When a man still lives with his heart, although he is a believer, one of 'the faithful', still, he lacks Guidance. When a man becomes selfless, Guidance presents itself."¹¹⁸

In the following passage, commenting on the *Ḥadīth*, "Meditate on all things but do not meditate on God's Essence," selflessness also appears as the foundation of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's epistemology:

"Reflect on God's attributes but do not reflect on His Essence." Here the world of the religious Law (*shar'*) is turned topsy-turvy. Do you understand what I am saying? I am saying that the light of God Almighty can be seen by oneself and at this level a man is with himself. But the Essence of God may be seen only through God and this experience takes 'the man' out of a man, rendering him selfless. This is the meaning of "Vision comprehendeth Him not" [Koran VI: 103] which ravishes the wayfarer from himself; "but He comprehendeth all Vision" [VI: 103] implies that *all is God*.¹¹⁹

iii. Another essential part of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's doctrine of mystical death is his emphasis on spiritual development over concern with the physical body. He believed that God's grace and attention are

115. The allusion here is to Koran LV: 29 – "All that are in the heavens and the earth (*arḍ*) entreat Him" – following the two verses (26, 27) from Sura LV quoted above.

116. T 53-55.

117. That is, under the aegis of God's omnipresent vision, the creature – whether angel or savant – ceases to be veiled by its own temporality from its Creator.

118. T 324, no. 425.

119. T 303-04, no. 399.

not directed towards the body but the Spirit, God's regard for the body being purely illusory and figurative (*majāzī*). The real development occurs in the heart and the soul. It is only the heart which can direct God's attention to the flesh, resulting in immortality:

God's regard and love is never directed at the body (*qālib*) but rather is directed at the soul (*jān*) and heart (*dīl*), for "Verily, God does not look at your forms nor your deeds. Rather God's attention is focused on your hearts." [*Ḥadīth*] The heart, as delegated by God, directs a figurative attention (*naẓar-i majāzī*) toward the bodily frame so that the body may remain a brief moment in the world until the advent of death. When death arrives, if the heart had directed its attention towards the body, the body does not die, for "Verily, We shall quicken him with a good life" [Koran XVI: 97], but if the heart had disregarded the body, then total death ensues.¹²⁰

* * *

If a man perishes totally at death, why then did Muḥammad say [about death] on his deathbed, "The best friend, the purest delight, the most faithful perfection!"? Why did he remark that, "The tomb is a garden among the fields of Paradise, or else, a pit among the holes of hell"—?

...But a complete exposition of this idea is found in the verse: "Think not of those who are slain in the Path of God that they are dead. No, they are living with their Lord." [III: 169] If this were not so, why would Muḥammad have said, "The believer is alive in both the worlds [i.e. here and Hereafter]," or elsewhere have stated, "The friends of God do not die but are transported from realm to realm"—?

All of this is an exposition of the truth that when the body dies, the soul lives on and subsists; if the body descends into the grave, the soul is brought "firmly established [in the favour of a mighty King]" [LIV: 55].¹²¹

Earlier in the *Tamhīdāt*, 'Ayn al-Qudāt had commented on this same verse, offering more of an anagogic interpretation, again supporting his argument with *Ḥadīth*:

The meaning of "firmly established in the favour of a mighty

King" is the throne of the innermost consciousness upon which lovers seat themselves. Listen to what Muḥammad (peace be upon him!) said to Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh on the day when his father, 'Abdullāh ibn Rawāh was slain during the battle of Uḥud, thus becoming a martyr. He stated, "God has brought your father to life and has established him on the Divine Throne with the Prophet Moses."¹²²

Furthermore, anyone who considers the Prophet as a 'body' is an infidel, 'Ayn al-Qudāt asserts, citing verses LXIV: 6 and LIV: 24 from the Koran, which describe how disbelievers derided the pre-Islamic Prophets of monotheism for being "mere mortals." On the other hand, the Prophet Muḥammad was

a soul purified of the fleshly human condition (*bashariyyat*) and beyond this world. The verse, "Say: I am only a mortal like you," [Koran XVIII: 10, in reference to the Prophet Muḥammad] concerns the [Prophet's] body alone and the body is not of Yonder World. Alas! The Jews and the Christians said, "We are sons of God and His loved ones" [V: 18] and received in the Scripture a brusque rebuttal: "Say: Why then does He chastise you for your sins? Nay, you are but mortals of His making." [V: 18] You are still caught up in humanity. How could you ever be Our friend? The friends of God are not human (*bashar*), yet your entire makeup consists of *la condition humaine* (*bashariyyat*).¹²³

From 'Ayn al-Qudāt's visionary perspective, neither death nor life have ultimate value in itself. What matters for the lover is not the body's estate but the heart's state. Such a vision of life is indeed at odds with the outlook of modern man, yet is hardly alien to traditional Western Christendom, and was even expressed by Shakespeare:

*Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither.
Ripeness is all.*¹²⁴

120. T 163, no. 219.

121. T 161-62.

122. T 132.

123. T 164-65, no. 220.

124. Shakespeare, *King Lear* V, 2.

To 'Ayn al-Qudāt, what constitutes the "Perfection of the life" (that "heavenly mansion, raging in the dark," to use W.B. Yeats' image¹²⁵)—is nothing but this very "ripeness" of divine Love. Love is worshipped in the religion of love and 'life' and 'death' are but incidental to this immortal passion:

For the lover's reckoning is with love: of what account is the Beloved to him? His aim is Love and his life is Love and without Love he dies. . . . From Love he experiences so much grief, pain and rue that he ceases to be tied down by Union nor afflicted by the torments of separation. For Union gives him no joy, nor separation any pain or suffering. He has surrendered up his will to Love.¹²⁶

iv. Given this relativity of physical existence, death may even become an object of desire to the love-intoxicated mystic—did not the Judge claim he prayed for death? The Sufi may court calamity, even befriend adversity:

The bread and butter of men is calamity and pain and adversity. Their meals are set for lunch and dinner at the door of Iblis. By the Almighty Majesty of Eternity, you do not understand what you are reading! How could these accounts ever be related to the likes of you? . . . It requires a man who is detached from both the worlds and has become uniquely isolated in his contemplation (*fard*), to be able to eat pain in place of bread and water.¹²⁷

In his quest for annihilation and purification from selfhood, 'Ayn al-Qudāt was led to accept and to acknowledge, in Blake's words, the truth of the maxim "Listen to a fool's reproach, it is a kingly title." Indeed, many of Blake's 'Proverbs of Hell' (from which the above adage is drawn) accord with the spirit of the Judge of Hamadān's pursuit of the fate of Iblis, accursed by God in this world, but beloved on the 'Day of Judgement'—the day when Love rules and the 'Law of Unity' reigns over all.¹²⁸ So Truth in the guise of pain is far preferable for the seeker of Transcendental Unity to

vanity bedecked in temporal 'grace'. This is the spirit of many of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's utterances concerning the high spiritual level of "those who embrace adversity." The following passage is typical:

Ah! Do you think that calamity (*balā*) is given to just anyone? What do you know of calamity? Be constant until you reach a point where you would willingly purchase calamity at the price of your own soul. Did not Shibli refer to this experience by saying: "O God, all people seek You for Your grace and comfort, but I seek you for the sake of calamity." So wait until the alchemy of "an attraction from the Divine attraction"¹²⁹ begins to transform you. Then you will know what calamity is! Is not this then the true context of the Prophet's saying: "Just as gold is tried by being placed in a crucible over fire, so is the believer tried through disasters and calamities."

The believer must endure so much calamity that he becomes one with it and calamity becomes one with him. Then he becomes calamity in essence and calamity becomes in essence, him. Thenceforth, he ceases to be conscious of calamity. Alas! This is the meaning of the verse "Lo! Kings, when they enter a township, ruin it." [Koran XXVII: 34]

...Alas, have you not heard the saying of that great master, "The lover's claim to love is insincere unless he enjoys the rebuke of the Beloved"? . . . Whoever does not endure separation from the Beloved will not attain the pleasure of Union; whoever does not consider the Beloved's insult as a Grace is alien from the Beloved.¹³⁰

Hence, one of the highest degrees of divine love, according to 'Ayn al-Qudāt, is to enjoy the Beloved's rebuke more than the beneficence of others;¹³¹ here, the true lover stakes his life upon the 'truth of pain':

Every day, a thousand times over, the friends of God become intoxicated with the wine of Union and then, in the end, are abased and trampled beneath the feet of separation from him. The lover is still a disciple, and in this world the lover is hung

125. N. Jeffares (ed.) *W.B. Yeats, Selected Poetry* (London 1962), "The Choice", p. 153

126. T 101.

127. T introduction, p. 91. From one of the epistles.

128. See T 226-27, no. 295; T 122-23, no. 171. *Awn, op. cit.*, p. 141.

129. An allusion to a well-known Prophetic tradition: "There is a kind of attraction which comes from God and is comparable to the sum of all the acts of devotion of man and angel."—*Furūzānfar, Aḥādith-i Mathnawī*, p. 119)

130. T 244-45, nos. 318-19.

131. T 221.

from the cross of separation. Have you not heard the address which is directed at the seekers of Him in That world?

*Many there are who are seekers of Us in this town;
Ah! How wretched is the labor of all who seek Us.
Ten thousand gallows have been raised
at the door to Our court and upon each gallows
another miserable disciple is strung up.*

From within the souls of the seekers of the Divine Presence, each day a myriad times the cry goes up: "We well know that our Beloved is fond of wrath and calamity (*qahr wa balā*), but unto His wrath and calamity we have submitted ourselves. From Him comes calamity (*balā*), but from us contentment (*riḍā*); from Him comes wrath (*qahr*) but from us love (*mihr*). ...For, alas, it is such a love which declares, "Eternal suffering we have chosen for ourselves and have given over mercy and grace to be the portion of others."

...That chivalrous man Iblis says, "If others flee from the blow, I will take it upon my own neck." ...Since my Beloved considered me worthy of commemoration, whether the warp and woof of my fate's carpet be woven black or white is all one to me." Whoever distinguishes between these two [i.e. between fortune and misfortune] is still raw in matters of love. Whether one is given poison or honey, sugar or colocynth, wrath or grace by the Friend's hand, what difference does it make? Whoever is a lover of grace or a lover of wrath is in love with himself, not with the Beloved. Alas! When a prince bestows a honorary robe or hat upon someone, the giving of the gift itself suffices; the rest, the substance and kind of the gift, is not a lover's concern.¹³²

Hence, the fruit of this conscious cultivation of adversity and calamity is detachment from all temporal ties and spiritual habits, the inner 'heart's Beloved' taking precedence over external religious ties. Describing Uways Qarani's physically 'distant', although spiritually intimate, love of the Prophet, 'Ayn al-Qudāt observed: "He did not behold the Prophet's outer form. His only object of interest in the body [i.e. physical presence] of the Prophet was to behold the Prophet's inner meaning (*ma'nā*). When at last he contemplated that

meaning, the Prophet's form (*ṣūrat*) had become a veil for him."¹³³ Likewise, the relationship enjoyed by Abū Bakr with the Prophet was one of 'the soul and the heart' rather than of the physical body and material presence; in a similar manner, the physical absence or presence (*ghaybat wa ḥudūr*) of the spiritual master makes little difference to the advanced disciple.¹³⁴

v. At this point, the question arises as to the true reality of the after-death state. According to 'Ayn al-Qudāt, the reality of death and the condition of the Next world are only comprehensible by analogy, by way of 'making a similitude' or *tamaththul*, that is, by the method of 'imaginalization'. "Vision of the Hereafter and the spiritual world (*'ālam-i malakūt*) is all dependent on imaginalization," he writes, adding that "it is no small thing to gain true cognizance of imaginalization."¹³⁵ Understanding the reality of imaginalization, or gaining awareness of the similitudes which bridge the material world and the supraformal realm, all depend on realizing *mystical death*. On this, he pronounces:

Don't you realize that [physical] death is not real death? True death is annihilation (*fanā'*). Whoever does not realize this [real] death has no life. Do you understand what I say? I say that as long as 'you' are 'you' and caught up in your 'self', you do not really exist. When 'you' cease to be 'you' then you [truly] become yourself.

Alas! What do you hear? According to us, death is that an individual die from everything except the Beloved, so that he finds life through and in the Beloved. Then you will realize, within yourself, how death occurs.¹³⁶

'Ayn al-Qudāt goes on to explain that the present state of mortal humanity (*bashariyyat*) is itself a tomb; all the torments of the grave are actually with us in the present life. Man's body is itself a tomb, and the torments of the afterlife are all experienced owing to his subjection to passions and lusts in the present life:

133. T 34 no. 48.

134. T 33 no. 47.

135. T 287, no. 374.

136. T 287-88, no. 374.

132. T 222-224.

The first thing which the spiritual pilgrim becomes aware of concerning the realm of the Hereafter is the condition which prevails in the tomb, and the first imaginal similitude which the mystic sees is the tomb. For example, all of the things promised [in the Koran] as appearing in their tombs to the inhabitants of hell – such as snakes, scorpions, dogs and fire, are shown to him through imaginalization. These things are all in the interior of the spiritual man, for they all arise from him and are, therefore, always by his side.¹³⁷

All the worlds of the spirit and divinity lie “within the human heart,”¹³⁸ and the wondrous events of the Hereafter are all visions enjoyed by the Sufi through his realization of the analogical or imaginalized (*tamaththul*) nature of Reality, says the author of the *Tamhīdāt*.

Just as the lover’s religion is the Love of God, so his paradise is nearness and his hellfire distance from the Beloved.¹³⁹ ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s radical interiorization of Islamic eschatology leads him to assert that “the foundation of the existence of the state of the hereafter is upon imaginalization.” The science of imaginalization involves strenuous inner labor, and described as the highest of all spiritual sciences.¹⁴⁰

There are myriad mystical states and stations (*maqāmih*) within imaginalization (*tamaththul*). One of the stations which pertain to imaginalization is that the one who experiences it, even in a minute portion, if he remains at that station, will be totally bereft of himself, and is enabled to transcend his ‘self’. If deprived of this station, he becomes beside himself with loneliness and grief. Contemplative thought (*tafakkur*) stems from this station.

...Ah! How can you comprehend how this station transforms a person? I am an infidel if all that has been vouchsafed to me [of divine graces] has not solely been for the sake of this station. Wait until one atom of this spiritual station through similitude shows its outermost degree to you.¹⁴¹ Then you will understand the condition of a poor wretch like me!¹⁴²

137. T 288-89, no. 376.

138. T 291.

139. T 292, no. 384.

140. T 293, no. 385.

141. Translation uncertain.



‘Ayn al-Qudāt and four others outside a Metal-workers Shop. From a manuscript of the *Majālis al-'ushshāq*. MS. Ouseley, Add 24, f. 46r. (Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford).

V. CONCLUSION – THE LAWS OF ETERNITY BEYOND SEPARATION AND UNION

*Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving of it: he died
As one that had been studied in his death,
To throw away the dearest thing he owed.*

Shakespeare, *Macbeth* I, 4¹⁴³

In his monumental three-volume history of Sufism, the *Tarā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh describes 'Ayn al-Qudāt's tragic career as "Christian in death and Ḥallājīan by orientation."¹⁴⁴ and Y.E. Bertel's, in his classic Russian study of Persian Sufism, notes that 'Ayn al-Qudāt's ultimate aspiration and longing, expressed throughout the *Tamhīdāt* was "to enjoy the fate of Ḥallāj."¹⁴⁵

The physical facts of his execution tell us that by the order of the Seljuk vizier of Iraq, Abu'l-Qāsim Qiwām al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn 'Alī al-Dargazīnī on May 6-7, 1131 (Jumādā II 525) at the age of 33, 'Ayn al-Qudāt was skinned alive and strung up on a gibbet at the entrance of the college at which he taught.¹⁴⁶ The political circumstances of his death, as recent studies have demonstrated,¹⁴⁷ show that his execution was not the outcome of "an anti-mystical trend, but because of a personal vendetta in Saljuq politics," and that owing to this vendetta, "he received the full impact of the fears and frustrations of the 'ulamā'."¹⁴⁸ But his death, in spiritual terms, by no means concluded the biography of the mystic Judge of Hamadān, for his death was also a mystical one—the fruit of the soul's tree, as Rūmī put it—as well as physical martyrdom. His was a death, which rather, "reencloses [life] in the divine origin of its potentiali-

142. T 295, no. 386.

143. Malcolm, reporting to Duncan the execution of the Thane of Cawdor.

144. Edited by Muḥammad Ja'far Mahjūb, (Tehran 1940), II, p. 568.

145. *Taṣawwuf wa adabīyyāt-i taṣawwuf*, translated from Russian into Persian by Sirūs Īzādī (Tehran 1977), p. 418.

146. Arberry, *A Sufi Martyr*, p. 14; Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh, *op. cit.*, II, p. 571.

147. See Ernst, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-15 and Raḥīm Farmanīsh, *Aḥwāl wa āthār 'Ayn al-Qudāt Abū'l-Mu'ālī 'Abdullāh ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Mīyānjī al-Hamadānī* (Tehran: Mullā 1360 A.Hsh./1981), pp. 55-81.

148. Ernst, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

(les, forever, through a kind of spiritual 'upward curve' of time."¹⁴⁹

Massignon's view of Ḥallāj as one of the immortal "Witnesses of the Eternal" whose "posthumous 'survival' on earth through chains of suffering and sacrificed witnesses involves us and draws us away from earth toward 'temples' (*hayākil*) of the eternal City of souls raised up from the transfigured holocaust of their earthly bodies,"¹⁵⁰ recalls 'Ayn al-Qudāt's own Sufi 'religion of love', according to which the believer's "bread and butter" is adversity, whose submission to God (*islām*) is the joyous embrace of the lover who is "hung from the cross of separation in this world" (T 223), and whose 'death' is actually 'Life' gained through realization of the meaning of (the Sufic version of the Delphic maxim) 'spiritual poverty' (cf. Koran XXXV: 15): annihilation. Indeed, the ecstatic spirit of Ḥallāj haunts the rhythmical Persian prose of the *Tamhīdāt*, with the Judge of Hamadān often comparing his own career to that of Ḥallāj—whom he praises as "the master of lovers, chief of gnostics."¹⁵¹ Scorched by the passion of that enigmatic martyr from Shiraz, in the *Tamhīdāt* 'Ayn al-Qudāt had likewise predicted his own martyrdom, invoking his own death in aspiration for relief from the bondage of division:

Do you imagine that being slain on the Path of God is a calamity? No, on our Path, to be slain is to gain a soul."¹⁵² ... We [God] gave him [Ḥallāj] the key to the Arcanum of Mysteries. He revealed Our mystery. So We placed adversity (*balā*) in his way that others might take heed and keep our secrets. Not everyone is capable of keeping such a secret—alas! Tomorrow—or after a few days—may it come to pass that you too will see how 'Ayn al-Qudāt has attained this blessing, having forsaken his own head to obtain headmastership!¹⁵³

In the light of the above discussion of the inner reality of *fanā'*, had not 'Ayn al-Qudāt already died before his own martyrdom—died to

149. L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Ḥallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. H. Mason (Princeton University Press, 1982), vol. I, p. lxviii.

150. *Ibid.*, p. lxiii.

151. T 235.

152. T 235.

153. T 236.

his own desire, and like the magicians in the Koran who converted to the religion of Moses, been quickened in the realm of annihilation.

*Pharoah imagined that the magicians
felt terror, suffered abasement and fear for their lives;
Little did he know that they were free,
reclining in comfort upon the doorway
of the light of the heart.*¹⁵⁴

Pursuit of union and flight from separation, thought 'Ayn al-Qudāt, were illegitimate desires for advanced Sufis to harbor... he had even written in reproach to one of his own disciples:

The beginning of the end of divine love is that the lover forget the Beloved—what concern has the lover with the Beloved? ...A man must be so subjected and disciplined through the experience of union and separation with the Beloved that neither is his joy increased through union nor is his pain amplified by separation. If such is the farthest stage of beginners, it is but the point of departure for adepts near the end of the mystical way. You have not even come out of your father's loins!¹⁵⁵

"You must realize," wrote 'Ayn al-Qudāt—as if describing his death which indeed transcended all martyrdom of the flesh—"that there is a type of death above and beyond corporeal death and another type of life beyond that of the corporeal and physical frame." In this second type of life, "in Yonder world," he states, "all is life within life, whereas in this world, all is death within death. Until you transcend death, you'll never attain life. 'Lo! the abode of the Hereafter - that is Life, if they but knew" [XXIX: 64].¹⁵⁶ There are two births, pronounced the Judge, and quoting the saying of Jesus on being 'born again', he comments that the second birth for the Sufi is "to be born from oneself, so that he sees the realm of Eternity and

154. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, III 1721.

155. T, introduction, p. 90.

156. T 319, no. 418. Cf. Massignon's remarks on Ḥallāj's martyrdom: "We are propounding here the absolute transcendence of the humblest of heroic acts as sole cornerstone of the eternal City. The history of religions thus conceived envisages it as the axis and the apex of the world in motion towards the next life, even if the author of this act forgets it." *The Passion*, p. lxxv.

God."¹⁵⁷

Admittedly, here the exposition of 'Ayn al-Qudāt deserts the realm of common sensory experience and theoretical theology, and propounds a completely visionary theology, leading the author to bluntly admit that he is now outside the pale of formal Islam.¹⁵⁸

I know that these words do not hail from the realm of your religious conventionalism—which is, anyway, but spiritual conventionalism ('*adat-parastī*, i.e. idolatrous attachment to habits). Spiritual conventionalism belongs to the realm of the *Shari'a*, and practicing the *Shari'a* (*shari'a-warzī*) is all spiritual conventionalism.. Unless you abandon spiritual conventionalism you can never be a minister of the Truth (*haqiqat-warz*).¹⁵⁹

According to this viewpoint, faith and infidelity in their formal sense—of a purely non-existential commitment to, or confession of, the dogmas of monotheism—become meaningless. All that is not Divinity is Infidelity: the existence of the state of 'humanity' is but rust corroding the spiritual heart, to be burned away by recitation of the Koran and meditation upon death.¹⁶⁰ When the rust of humanity is dissolved, 'annihilation' is attained, and the state of 'indwelling' (*ḥulūl*) in which the divine and the human are united, is realized. Knowing, however, that his readers will perceive him as being an advocate of 'incarnationism'—the heretical aspect of *ḥulūl*, of which doctrine Ḥallāj was accused, against which Hujwiri and Sarraj had warned and railed—'Ayn al-Qudāt comments:

Alas! Here 'indwelling' will appear. O friend, if you wish to obtain eternal bliss, spend one hour in the company of a *ḥulūlī* who is a Sufi so that you can realize who the *ḥulūlī* really is. Did not a Sufi master at this juncture exclaim, "The Sufi is God"? 'Abdullāh Anṣārī says that "the scholar vaunts his knowledge and the ascetic prides himself on his austerities; of the Sufi what can be said for the Sufi is all Him." If the Sufi is Him, then the

157. T 319.

158. On 'Ayn al-Qudāt's concept of religious faith, see L. Lewisohn, "From Islamic Falsity to Real Infidelity: Interiorization of Faith in the Writings of 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadhānī and Maḥmūd Shabistari," forthcoming.

159. T 320, no. 419.

160. T 299, no. 392.

Sufi is not an 'indweller' (*hulūlī*). Whatever is God implies that his indwelling is also unification. In this station, whatever you have heard from him, you have really heard from God.

Ah! Whoever desires to hear the divine mysteries without any mediation, may say 'Hear them from 'Ayn al-Qudāt Hamadānī"—which has the meaning [of the *ḥadīth*) "God speaks from the tongue of 'Umar." If it were possible for anything among created, living beings to be excluded from the hearing, sight, knowledge, and power of God Almighty, it would be possible that it also be excluded from the hearing, vision and power of such a wayfarer.¹⁶¹

In this imaginal realm envisioned by 'Ayn al-Qudāt, a life spent in 'quest of annihilation' is not in vain, for the worst misfortune or calamity a man or woman may suffer is neither corporeal death nor physical adversity, but imprisonment in selfhood. 'Ayn al-Qudāt's description of mystical death leads him far beyond conventional Islam, for when denuded of 'selfhood', the dictates of the religious law no longer apply to the mystic. Faith becomes vision and the outer letter of the Scripture becomes a vividly interiorized audition. This is the 'Christian death' of which Ma'sūm 'Alī Shāh spoke, the passion for which pervades mystics of every denomination and religion.

*Such are the laws of Eternity, that each shall mutually
Annihilate himself for others' good, as I for thee.
Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of thy Churches
Is to impress on men the fear of death, to teach
Trembling & fear, terror, constriction, abject selfishness.
Mine is to teach men to despise death & to go on
In fearless majesty annihilating Self... & put off
In Self annihilation all that is not of God alone....*¹⁶²

161. T 300, nos. 393-94.

162. William Blake, *Milton* 38: 35-41, 47-48.

VOLUME I

THE HERITAGE OF SUFISM

Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi (700-1300)



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